The convergence of three trends makes service to minority students an imperative for continuing education: (1) increasing proportions of diverse groups in the U.S. population and workforce; (2) continuing education and retraining as keys to survival in a workplace of change; and (3) declining college enrollments of diverse populations and increasing income disparities related to level of educational attainment. Issues involved in participation and retention of minorities begin with campus climate. Ways to improve campus climate include: genuine pluralism that recognizes diversity of perceptions and values; increasing numbers of minority faculty and adult students who can serve as mentors and role models; and strong, visible actions in hiring practices, reward systems, and policy implementation. Financial aid is another key concern. Low-income groups appear to have less access to financial aid, and little is available for part-time study, despite high numbers of minority part-time students. Finally, adult and continuing education's role as a force for social change requires a reconceptualizing of lifelong learning. Instead of the existing hierarchy, a more equitable system would be a continuous configuration of educational offerings in which success at one level would mean direct access to the next. (Annotations of 18 print resources are provided; 3 resource organizations are listed.)
Minority Participation in Continuing Education

Trends and Issues Alerts

Sandra Kerka
MINORITY PARTICIPATION IN CONTINUING EDUCATION

Census data document the increasing proportions of diverse groups in the U.S. population and consequently the work force (Commission on Minority Participation 1988). Employment projections highlight continuing education and retraining as keys to survival in a workplace of change. At the same time, college enrollment of diverse populations appears to be declining, and income disparities related to level of educational attainment are increasing (Moe 1990; Ross-Gordon 1990). The convergence of these three trends makes service to minority students an imperative for continuing education.

By 1988, one-third of the U.S. population was African, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American (Commission 1988). However, participation rates of these groups in higher education have declined in the last decade (Ross-Gordon 1990), and nearly half of all minority college students are part time. In addition, diverse groups are underrepresented in the growing area of employer-sponsored training. For example, African Americans, 9.5 percent of the work force in 1987, received 5.1 percent of formal training; comparable numbers for Hispanic Americans were 5.5 percent and 2.7 percent (Martin 1993). Minority participation in continuing education, especially continuing professional education, remains minimal (Moe 1989; Taylor 1990). At the same time, access to continuing education is narrowing as financial crises cause an increasing focus on market-driven, income-generating programming (Martin 1993).

Issues involved in participation and retention of minorities begin with campus climate. Minority students, faculty, staff, and administrators who feel unwelcome or alienated in the campus environment are severely challenged to stay and succeed. Moe (1989) cites a survey showing that large numbers of minority students feel their values are not reflected in the university culture. Because climate is central to all other efforts to improve minority participation, it is "both the point of departure and the culmination of all other efforts" (Green 1989, p. 113). Ways to improve campus climate include genuine pluralism that recognizes the diversity of perceptions and values (Taylor 1990); increasing the numbers of minority faculty and adult students, who can serve as mentors and role models (Kramer 1989; McCormick 1991); and strong, visible actions in hiring practices, reward systems, and policy implementation (Green 1989).

Financial aid is a key concern. Some suggest that access may be more a class than a race issue (National University Continuing Education Association, 1989; Taylor 1990). Low income groups appear to have less access to financial aid (Orfield 1992), and little is available for part-time study, despite the high numbers of minority part-time students. Zwerling (1986) asserts that in continuing education, financial aid is often based on achievement: the ability to hold a job and qualify for tuition reimbursement or pay one's own fees. Thus, those with higher educational and employment attainment consolidate their positions and widen the economic gap.

Finally, adult and continuing education's role as a force for social change requires a reconceptualizing of lifelong learning. Rather than the existing hierarchy, a more equitable system would be a continuous "configuration of offer-

Print Resources


Studies the impact of new immigration law on minority work force participation and examines how a focus on immigration ignores educational reforms crucial to the access and training of minorities.


The United States is moving backwards in efforts to achieve full participation of minority citizens. A national commitment to enabling minorities to achieve equal quality of life is essential.


Students from minority groups are least successful in public schools, due to silent discrimination in the form of cultural, linguistic, and social stereotyping. Adult educators of minority students must deal with the legacy of students' educational background.

Gillett-Karam, R. "Confronting Diversity in the Community College Classroom." New Directions for Community Colleges no. 79 (Fall 1992): 83-94.

Through encouraging teaching excellence and enabling teachers to be leaders in the classroom, colleges can educate students while addressing diversity. Six critical teaching practices focus attention on the needs of women and racial/ethnic minorities.


Focuses on leadership, an integrated approach, and institutional changes for developing a pluralistic campus climate.

Includes "On Teaching Language and Culture in America," "Immigration and Hispanic Educational Opportunities: Challenges for the 1990s," and "Strategies for Continuing Higher Education: Improving Educational Opportunities for Minorities."


Demonstrates the substantial link between financial assistance and college attendance and reasons for the declining access of minority and low income groups to college financial aid.


Demographic trends and data on minority participation suggest inequities in access. Theoretical explanations should attend to sociocultural forces affecting motivation. Models of practice must be based on understanding of the sociocultural context.


A British survey found little improvement in provision for minority students, little evidence of clear policy guidelines, few minority staff members, and low levels of minority involvement in continuing professional education.

Zwerling, L. S. "Lifelong Learning: A New Form of Tracking." *New Directions for Community Colleges* no. 54 (June 1986): 53-60. (ED 271 169)

Continuing education is potentially the most unequal form of higher education. Its contribution to social change depends upon new approaches to defining lifelong learning, a more equitable delivery system, and changes in affordability.

**Resource Organizations**


Association for Continuing Higher Education, c/o Scott Evenbeck, Executive Vice President, Indiana University-Purdue/University of Indianapolis, 620 Union Drive, Room 143, Indianapolis, IN 46202-5171 (317/274-2637).


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